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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [SO](#)  
SUBJECT: SOMALIA - THE TFG, AL-SHABAAB, AND AL QAEDA

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

(S//NF) This message has been cleared by GRPO and the Defense Special Element Unit. It discusses growing indications of al-Shabaab - al Qaeda connections.

11. (S//NF) Summary: In his recent speech at the AU Summit in Sirte, President Sharif echoed others in the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), like Prime Minister Sharmarke, in holding al-Qaeda responsible for some of the TFG's current problems in Mogadishu and elsewhere in Somalia. Recent endorsements by al-Qaeda leaders of the Somalia "jihad," and what appear to be concerted efforts by East Africa Al Qaeda representative Saleh Nabhan to align al-Shabaab more closely with al-Qaeda through the training of foreign fighters in Somalia, interaction of al-Qaeda couriers, and other information suggest that a relationship exists. The probable involvement of foreign fighters trained by Nabhan, and others, in fighting the TFG in Mogadishu, and the participation of a Nabhan camp alumnus in a October 29, 2008, suicide bombing in Somalia suggest that the al-Qaeda - al-Shabaab relationship, or at least an al-Qaeda-inspired al-Shabaab, is directly complicating the efforts of the struggling TFG to establish itself in the Somali capital. Reports of increased numbers of potential foreign fighters entering Somalia from Yemen and elsewhere could spell even more problems to come for President Sharif's government and, potentially, for other countries in the region and beyond. The interdiction of several Somali emissaries to al-Qaeda over the last year is evidence of a continued and active interest in establishing a link with fellow jihadists. End summary.

Al Qaeda Support of al-Shabaab  
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12. (SBU) The frequency of statements by al-Qaeda senior leaders about Somalia increased with the appearance of the newly-minted Sheikh Sharif government in Mogadishu and the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in February. With the exit of Ethiopian troops some in al-Qaeda's ranks may have worried that enthusiasm for continued fighting among their Somali supporters would wane. On February 13, Abu-Yahya al-Libi warned that ENDF withdrawal did not mean that the "battle" had come to an end. A few days later, Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Somalis not to lay down their arms until "God's word is supreme." In the middle of March, Usama Bin Laden exhorted adherents to "continue their steps on the path of jihad."

13. (SBU) Also apparently galvanizing al-Qaeda was the selection of a TFG President with credible Islamic credentials. The Al-Qaeda leadership was at pains to paint Sheikh Sharif as a U.S. and Ethiopian puppet, "another Karzai" in the words of Al-Libi, or no different from his predecessor, Abdullahi Yusuf, who bin-Laden had described as an "apostate." Sharif's previous affiliation with the

Islamic Courts and stated determination to introduce Sharia for Somalia were spun by al-Zawahiri as merely "hiding under the cloak of religion."

¶4. (SBU) Bin Laden's March call to continue the fight in Somalia was endorsed by al-Shabaab on its official website, and then-al Shabaab Spokesman Mukhtar Robow compared the military campaign in Somalia to jihads underway in Chechnya, Iraq, and Afghanistan in seconding bin Laden's call. The Islamic Administration in Kismaayo also rhetorically backed bin Laden, and urged continued attacks against the TFG.

¶5. (SBU) In addition to the higher profile that the al-Qaeda leadership has given Somalia since Sheikh Sharif's election as TFG President, al-Shabaab's increasingly adept use of the media in its fight against the TFG seems to have taken a page from al-Qaeda. After struggling to devise a strategy in the weeks following the mid-January withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia, al-Shabaab has recently seized the media advantage. It has attacked the TFG's ill-advised declaration of a state of emergency and Speaker Madobe's appeal for help from Somalia's neighbors, even the Ethiopians.

#### Suicide the Weapon of Choice

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¶6. (S//NF) While it is true that these statements can be viewed as a low-cost al-Qaeda strategy for associating fighting in Somalia with jihad elsewhere, there have been other signs that al-Qaeda's support for al-Shabaab may be more than rhetorical. (It is worth noting that Saleh al-Somali, al-Qaeda's number three, is an ethnic Somali.)

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Suicide bombings, once unheard of in Somalia, have become increasingly routine as exemplified by the October 29, 2008, multiple simultaneous attacks (an al-Qaeda trademark) in Hargeisa and Bossaso. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for two al-Qaeda-like suicide bombings: a May 24 suicide attack on TFG forces in Mogadishu and the June 18 Beledweyne explosion which killed TFG Minister of National Security Omar Hashi. In some cases, the perpetrators are foreigners trained in camps run by East Africa Al Qaeda representative Saleh Nabhan. In other cases, the operations were the result of Eritrean financing and training.

¶7. (S//NF) Since Nabhan's selection as senior trainer for al-Shabaab's training in summer 2008, the flow of foreigners to Somalia has broadened to encompass fighters from south Asia, Europe, and North America, Sudan, and East Africa, particularly trainees from Kenya. (In a video broadcast at the end of August 2008, Nabhan invited foreign fighters to his camps in Somalia.) As of June 2009, camps associated with Nabhan have come to look increasingly like those run by al-Qaeda. They have been using foreign instructors, making use of similar training aids, physical training formations/activities, explosives and special tactics training undergone by al-Qaeda trainees elsewhere. The regimen followed by recruits at Nabhan's camps differs markedly from that traditionally used in Somali camps, and seems to produce better results. Al-Shabaab graduates of Nabhan's camps are better disciplined. As of late June 2009, three active Somalia-based training camps were located in Cumar, Kamsuma, and Lantabouro and are currently connected by a common facilitation network.

¶8. (S//NF) Graduates from Nabhan's camps have had a direct impact on the fortunes of the TFG in Mogadishu. Foreign alumni of Nabhan's Cumar camp have traveled to Mogadishu to fight against the TFG and AMISOM, and the camps continue to generate increasing quantities of foreign graduates. Activity has recently been noted at the Kamsuma training camp, which is directly associated with the facilitation network of Cumar. (A U.S. citizen likely graduated from the Kamsuma camp participated in one of the October 29, 2008, suicide bombings in northern Somalia; al-Shabaab's most

sophisticated attack to date.)

#### Possibly Looking Beyond Somalia

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¶9. (S//NF) As noted in other channels, although Nabhan alumni have to date confined their fighting to Somalia, there are indications that foreigners trained in his Somalia-based camps could return to their countries of origin in order to conduct attacks. Nabhan is currently associated with efforts to attack Denmark, Nigeria, Kenya, and the UK. Danish trainees assessed to be attending one of the Nabhan-administered camps are reported to intend to return to Denmark to conduct unspecified attacks. The Nigerian threat stream consists of operatives traveling from Somalia to Nigeria to carry out an unspecified project assessed to be an attack, probably at the direction of Nabhan. A direct associate of Nabhan, formerly in Somalia and involved with the training program, planned to travel to Nigeria as part of this attack.

¶10. (S//NF) Nabhan himself has reportedly indicated an intention to conduct attacks on Kenya, as well as on the United Kingdom. A successful attack abroad would undoubtedly increase Nabhan's standing among the al-Qaeda leadership and meet al-Qaeda's goal of employing like-minded Sunni extremist groups to attack western interests, as well as to create the perception that groups in the Horn of Africa are participants in the global jihad, and potentially leverage their resources for conducting attacks in the western world.

RANNEBERGER